UE Presents: Don't Be Fooled!
Union Predicts Admin's Dirty Tricks

No employer, including yours, wants its workers to organize a union. No boss wants to pay higher wages or give up an ounce of the control they now have over workers. Most employers hire attorneys or professional union-busters who are paid hundreds of dollars an hour to stop workers from forming a union. Time after time, UE has seen these union busters use the same dirty tricks to mislead workers about the union. You have to be prepared to face these tricks if you are organizing a union.

Remember that the employer is desperately fighting against the union because management is scared of you: the united workers. If you remember that, you will win!

Trick #1: "The union is crooked. It's going bankrupt. It's a business. It only wants your dues money."

Dues are 1.44% of our pay. This is really a non-issue because we pay nothing until we have a contract that has been voted on and ratified by grad workers. Before we pay any dues, we will negotiate our first salary increase, which will easily exceed the cost of union dues. This has been the case with grad student unions elsewhere: NYU grad workers just negotiated a new contract. They won a 30% pay increase in the first year of their new contract, for instance. And Harvard negotiated a 2.8% pay increase last year, which is less than NYU but still outweighs the cost of dues.On average, workers in the U.S. who are in a union earn $186 more a week than those who are not in a union.

The contract is voted on by the union members. So if it would leave us worse off in terms of pay, why would we vote to approve it?

Union dues pay for the continued existence of the union and its complete independence as a workers' organization. Concretely, dues monies pay for trainings, communications, office spaces, attendance at regular conferences and conventions, union staff to do things like help negotiate contracts and then help enforce them as well as assist in grievances and arbitrations, and helping future groups of unorganized workers get organized (just as other UE members from across the country are currently helping fund our organizing drive at MIT). UE staff have the lowest salaries of any national union. There are no union bureaucrats earning bloated salaries at the expense of workers here.

⅓ of the dues stay local and we, the membership, gets to decide how that money is used

Trick #2: "We already have organizations like GSA, GSC, and committees addressing DEI, etc. We don't need a union here at MIT."

Discuss experiences that GSA and GSC members have had interacting with admin

Point out that long-time members of these orgs are in support of the GSU

-Point out many of the empty promises admin has made in the past and how we need actual power to ensure real and lasting gains that the admin cannot take away

-Why is the administration willing to accept and promote all those committees and initiatives but not a union? Because it knows full well that with a union grad workers gain real power and real say over the decisions that affect you. With a union, the admin won't just have to grant grad workers the favor of listening to them - the admin will be legally obligated to bargain with grad workers in good faith over all working conditions.

-Can the GSA or GSC bargain for dental insurance, for example? Grad workers at U of Michigan have free premium dental insurance thanks to the union.

Trick #3: "Unionizing will put a strain on your relationship with your advisor."

-We will be negotiating with the administration, not with our advisors.

-If you have a good working relationship with your advisor, the union will not strain that in any way. It could actually make it even better by reducing the managerial burden on your advisor or PI and allow them to instead focus purely on advising and mentoring.

-"When unionized and non-unionized graduate workers were surveyed, those who were unionized described more positive relationships with their advisors than their non-unionized peers (Rogers, S., Eaton, A. E., & Voos, P. B. (2014). Effects of unionization on graduate student employees: Faculty-student relations, academic freedom, and pay. ILR Review, 66(2), 487-510).

-However, if you have an abusive advisor, the union will place limits on the control of such advisors over grad workers, serve to level the playing field, and allow you to file grievances without fear of retaliation.

-With a union, workers and employers sit down as equals and discuss problems as they come up. This does not create conflict but prevents it.

Trick #4: "A graduate student union at MIT might dictate the number of hours you can work as a graduate research assistant. It might impact your research activities, such as attendance at conferences, engaging in field work or research conducted at other activities."

-A union contract will only place limits on being ***forced*** to overwork. Harvard's contract, for example, doesn't say a grad worker can't put in 70 hours of research and other work every week if they want to. It says grad workers shall not be required to work more than 20 hours a week. There's a big difference there.

-In the real world, how would "the union" physically prevent someone from putting in 70 hours if that's what that person wants to do? Would someone from the union be stationed outside a lab to prevent you from entering or be stationed at the airport to tackle you and prevent you from getting on that flight to that conference you want to attend?

Trick #5: "With a union, there are no guarantees. Negotiations are a gamble. You could end up winning, losing, or staying in the same place as you are now. You'll be bargaining from scratch. We just don't know what will happen."

-Can you say scare tactic?

-When you negotiate a first contract, you start with the pay, benefits, and rights you have now and build on them. For management to attempt to do otherwise would be considered "regressive bargaining" and that is illegal. You decide on your proposals and vote on them. The real gamble is in not having a union.

-Now, it is true that the union can't guarantee specific language in a contract or exact gains, e.g. "Your pay will go up 22%." The gains you make and the strength of your contract will depend on the strength and participation of you and your co-workers in your union.

-Again, why would grad workers vote to approve a contract that leaves them worse off?

Trick #6: "The union is going to be really disruptive to everyone's work, calling strikes that will stop you from doing your research and making progress towards your degree."

-No one can force us to strike. Only we can make that decision through a democratic vote and only then after we have exhausted all other options for winning what we deserve. Strike votes are sometimes taken during negotiations to show management that workers are united and committed to fighting for what they deserve but, in UE, over 95% of contracts are won without recourse to a strike.

Trick #7: "We're not anti-union. We just don't believe this union is right for you./I'm pro-union, just not this union."

The union is you! In truth, the administration will object to any union you choose to affiliate with. Their true problem is not with **this** union. It's with unions, period. We chose UE as our national union through a democratic vote because UE is a progressive, rank-and-file, member-led union that has a long track record of fighting and winning for all workers. Again, "this union" is us!

Trick #8: "The union is not for international grad workers."

-False. First of all, all grad workers, international students or not, are protected by federal labor law and have equal labor rights under the law to participate in the union. The union contract will cover all grad workers without distinction as to their national origin or visa status. International grad workers at over 60 colleges and universities across the U.S. have participated in and helped lead grad worker union campaigns. What's more, international students gain greater protections with unions such as happened at the University of Illinois at Chicago last year where the grad workers union won free summer 2020 housing in the dorms for all international students who needed it. The University of California grad workers have negotiated paid leaves to attend immigration-related appointments and hearings for themselves or family members. The grad workers union at Columbia University has negotiated the creation of 15 yearly $3000 summer fellowships for international students.

Trick #9: "Union bosses will run your union. They will tell you what to do."

In UE, there is no such thing as union "bosses". UE's motto is "the members run this union" and UE takes it seriously. UE staff work for the members of the union and not the other way around. Staff can and will give you advice and make recommendations based on experience but decisions are made by the members of the union. You elect your own representatives and

officials and can recall elected officials. You write your own bylaws as long as they don't conflict with the national constitution. You control your own treasury. You determine bargaining priorities. In UE, you are the union!

Trick #10: Promises and "guarantees" from the administration, better treatment all of a sudden, management listening tour, pleas from management for a second chance.

-Without a union contract, promises don't have to be kept and nothing is legally guaranteed. If the administration is sincere about making improvements, it should have no problem negotiating with us and signing a union contract. A union contract is legally binding. Promises aren't.

-Yale grad workers got a 30% stipend increase when they started organizing. If the admin offers you things, take them (you deserve them)! And then vote YES for the union so you can lock them into a union contract and win more!

The Truth: The bosses know that if workers are united there is nothing they can do to stop you!